| **Virginia Board of Education Agenda Item** | **Seal of the Commonwealth of Virginia** |
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# Agenda Item: C

## Date: September 20, 2018

### Title: Final Review of Autism Training for Transportation Providers as Required by Senate Bill 229 (2018)

#### Presenter: Mr. Daniel Irwin, Special Education Specialist/Autism and Assistive

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## Purpose of Presentation:

Action required by state or federal law or regulation.

**Executive Summary:**In response to Senate Bill 229 (Hanger), the Virginia Department of Education, through the Virginia Commonwealth University Autism Center for Excellence (VCU-ACE) has developed online training modules to meet the requirements outlined in §22.1-298.3., which states,

*The Board of Education shall establish a training program for school board employees who assist in the transportation of students on school buses, including individuals employed to operate school buses and school bus aides, on autism spectrum disorders, including the characteristics of autism spectrum disorders, strategies for interacting with students with autism spectrum disorders, and collaboration with other employees who assist in the transportation of students on school buses. Each school board employee who assists in the transportation of students with autism spectrum disorders on school buses shall participate in such training program.*

The 2017 General Assembly Autism Advisory Council determined that since school transportation providers have daily contact with children with autism, they need to have training to effectively interact with them and other professionals to maintain a safe environment while children are being transported. This requirement aligns with the Board’s Comprehensive Plan goal of achieving a high quality, effective learning environment in the objective to “actively foster equitable, supportive and safe academic, disciplinary, and physical environments…”

The five online modules are available at no cost to participants. Content addressed in these training modules include the following topics.

1. Characteristics of Autism – Participants will receive an overview of autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and the characteristics including communication deficits, social skills, and repetitive or restricted behaviors.
2. Positive Behavior Supports – This module provides an overview of positive behavior supports and how to utilize proactive strategies for all students, especially students with ASD.
3. Supports and Strategies – Participants will be introduced to specific evidence-based strategies for supporting students with ASD. These strategies include visual supports, communication supports, setting clear expectations, social narratives, reinforcement, and sensory accommodations.
4. Bullying –This module provides an overview of different types of bullying and examines why students with ASD may be more vulnerable to being bullied. This module provides strategies for recognizing and preventing bullying, with a focus on supporting students with ASD.
5. Collaboration – This module examines the importance of collaboration as well as practical strategies for improving communication among administrators, teachers, and transportation staff.

## Action Requested:

Final review: Action requested at this meeting.

## Superintendent’s Recommendation: The Superintendent of Public Instruction recommends that the Board of Education approve the Virginia Department of Education’s Autism Training for Transportation Providers as required by Senate Bill 229 (2018).

## Rationale for Action:

Pursuant to the *Code of Virgini*a, *§22.1-298.3.*, the Board is required to establish a training program for school divisions’ transportation providers that addresses the characteristics of autism spectrum disorders, strategies for interacting with students with autism spectrum disorders, and collaboration with other employees who assist in the transportation of students on school buses. School divisions are waiting for information and resources from the Department to implement this training program.

## Previous Review or Action:

No previous review or action.

Background Information and Statutory Authority:   
In response to Senate Bill 229, to meet the requirements outlined in §22.1-298.3, the Board of Education is required to establish a training program for school transportation providers to address the unique needs of children with autism spectrum disorders. The annual December 1 child count data from 2017 indicates that 21,106 students in Virginia Public Schools are receiving special education services under the category of autism. This represents a 60% increase since 2011. Many children with this disability have characteristics that impede communication and social skills, which may present challenging behaviors, especially in unstructured settings, such as school buses. Teachers and paraprofessionals receive specialized training to address these characteristics. The 2017 General Assembly Autism Advisory Council determined that since school transportation providers have daily contact with children with autism, they need to have training to effectively interact with them and other professionals to maintain a safe environment while children are being transported.

The Virginia Department of Education, through the Virginia Commonwealth University Autism Center for Excellence (VCU-ACE) has developed online training modules that comprise a staff development program available at the web site, [VCU-ACE’s Transportation site](https://vcuautismcenter.org/te/transportation.cfm). The online format allows several delivery options to meet the unique needs of the individual and/or school division. School division leaders may select from options for delivering the training aligned to the availability and needs of staff. VCU-ACE is available to help problem solve, find solutions, and provide resources and support. A [Facilitator’s Guide](https://vcuautismcenter.org/documents/ASD%20Transportation%20Training%20Facilitator%20Guide.pdf) and a [Participant Handout](https://vcuautismcenter.org/documents/ASD%20Transportation%20Training%20Participant%20Handout.pdf) are available to facilitate group discussion and participation.

1. Small Group – Participants meet and view modules as a group with facilitated discussion between each module. Ideally, the discussion will be co-facilitated by division transportation and special education staff. This option allows participants to access the expertise of each staff member and models the collaborative process highlighted in the training modules.

2. Autonomous – Participants meet in a predetermined location and complete modules in whole or in parts, with facilitated discussion following each module.

3. Individual participation – Individuals may access the training modules through the MyACE Dashboard. Participants are required to create an account through Credly, an online badging system. Participants will view video modules and complete a summative quiz to complete the training. Participants may complete modules over several sessions.

Use of a partnership approach between local special education and transportation leaders is encouraged. The most value from the training occurs where staffs from both departments are present to answer questions that may arise, direct attention to school division-specific policies and procedures, and speak to content information or additional resources as needed.

Timetable for Further Review/Action:

Following the Board of Education’s approval, the Department of Education staff will provide information and resources to school divisions through various communication mechanisms including Superintendent’s Memoranda, local special education directors’ regional meetings, and transportation directors’ meetings.

## Impact on Fiscal and Human Resources:

There is no fiscal or human impact on the Department of Education. There is no cost to school divisions or the participants for the VCU-ACE training. School divisions will need to schedule time for staff to access the training and document staff participation.